

Your

WORD

Is

Strength

A LIFE-APPLICATION DEVOTIONAL

BY BROTHER JONATHAN

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INTRODUCTION

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Dear Friend,

The Bible is the most important book in the entire world.

Though authored by men, it is the Holy Spirit who inspired every thought and word, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 PETER 1:21).

It is God's letter to us, the book of divine instructions. Through its pages, we find rebuke for our sin and comfort in times of sorrow, "All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 TIMOTHY 3:16-17). It is the means to know the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, "IN the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (JOHN 1:1).

As we walk with the Lord, we will learn to hear His voice and seek to do His will, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 TIMOTHY 2:15).

Unfortunately, many believers neglect faith, prayer and the study of God's Word. This results in boredom, dryness and emptiness, etc. There are no "quick-fixes" in receiving from God. We need to wait in His Presence and devour His Word, not just read "how to" books on Christian living. I ask that the Holy Spirit will awaken you to "draw nigh to God" (JAMES 4:8) and know the true source of strength for your every need as I say this, "As precious and as important as it is, it is not enough to just hear sermons from some great preachers or read books of some dedicated men and women of God telling us about their experiences, we need to be lost in the awesome wonder and glorious riches of Christ ourselves as we feast at His table in the secret closet of prayer". He is the manna from on high, the Bread who satisfies us completely.

Birthered out of my own desperate cry and need for more of Him, I pray that this volume of writings will encourage you to enter into "the school of the Holy Spirit" yourself. Don't depend entirely on some book, tape, counsellor, shepherd or pastor for answer and wisdom. Instead, get on your face before God and the Holy Ghost will be your true Comforter and Preacher. It is He who brings the Scriptures alive to you and enables you to apply His truth in your everyday life as you hunger for Christ and Christ alone.

God richly bless you, my brother and sister!

In His grace, yours,



Jonathan Heng.

1. SET THINE HOUSE IN ORDER

“IN those days was Hez-e-ki’ah sick unto death. And the prophet Isaiah the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live. Then he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done *that which is good* in thy sight. And Hez-e-ki’ah wept sore. And it came to pass, afore Isaiah was gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came to him, saying, Turn again, and tell Hez-e-ki’ah the captain of my people, Thus saith the LORD, the God of David thy father, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up unto the house of the LORD” (2 Kings 20:1-5).

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Together with themes like “Prepare to meet thy God” (Amos 4:12) and “Therefore be ye also ready” (Matthew 24:44), this passage in 2 Kings 20:1-5 is one of my favourite when it comes to spiritual readiness.

One of the fruits of Godly ministries is to challenge people to “get right with God!” in the spirit of love. However, once our own spiritual house is in order, it becomes our responsibility to now win our family and friends to Christ, if they have not already done so. We need to wear “gospel shoes” to be witnesses unto Jesus, “And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (Ephesians 6:15); “And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! (Romans 10:15).

In an ever changing world, there are still some things that never change. One of them is, “The blood and the cross of Jesus Christ will never lose its power!”.

Hallelujah!

“God, shake and wake me out of the sin of procrastination. Let me touch lives for You. In Jesus name.”

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2. GOD’S COVENANT FOR MALE/FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS

“I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl” (Job 31:1; *NIV*).

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When an individual is not right with God, he or she will look at the opposite sex with impure motives.

But when we delight ourselves in the Lord (according to Psalm 37:4), we will praise and thank Him for His beautiful creation in members of the opposite sex. Delighting ourselves in God oftentimes require patience and waiting on Him (according to Isaiah 40:31). I realize that with the bombardment of the media promoting instant gratification, the challenge to stand pure for Jesus Christ is even greater.

The desire to develop a relationship between us and that member of the opposite sex is natural and God-given. However, we need to follow God’s way and control our desires by wanting the fear and the love of the Lord, “He will fulfil the desire of them that fear him: he also will hear their cry, and will save them” (Psalm 145:19) and “...Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:37).

“Father, as I take delight in the Lord and seek Your will concerning a lifetime partner, I pray that You will keep me pure. In Jesus name, I resist you, Satan, and your enticements to sin. Amen.”

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3. HEALER OF THE BROKEN~HEARTED

“The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Psalm 34:18).

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To have a broken heart is more than just grieving over our sins or because we are

hurt, but also because we have a glimpse of eternity and feel a portion of the Lord's heart. One of the greatest challenge to the Body of Christ is to put into action the words of the Apostle Paul, "And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26). This is a positive and powerful demonstration of Kingdom living in the highest order.

When we are suffering deeply, we do not necessarily need to go to some well-known preacher for deliverance, what we want is to relate to some ordinary, unsung hero of the faith who has endured afflictions, and yet has come through it all trusting God, whose "strength is made perfect in weakness..." (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Spiritually-speaking, when we place ourselves at the feet of the cross in the Master's hand, He will not cast us aside. He is near to the broken hearted and the crushed in spirit, "A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory" (Matthew 12:20).

"Lord, forgive me for the times I've judged others in Your Body. Let me now help and love the suffering members instead. In Jesus lovely name."

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4. GOD'S ANSWER TO OUR SEXUAL DESIRE

"O GOD, thou *art* my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so *as* I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy lovingkindness *is* better than life, my lips shall praise thee. My soul followeth hard after thee: thy right hand upholdeth me" (Psalm 63:1-3,8).

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In these days where sexual immorality abounds, the message of hell and judgment needs to be proclaimed to the unrepentant fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, etc. (read 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9-18).

I know this sounds cruel and harsh, but God's blessing and joy for a sexual relationship can only be fulfilled within the bonds of holy matrimony.

God is going to hold every individual who promotes the enticements of sexual immorality and violence answerable and accountable for causing others to stumble and sin.

As a single young individual (as I write this), I know what it means to face the wilderness of loneliness, temptations and unfulfilled sexual desire. However, as God enables and strengthens me, I choose to follow His way. Instead of habitually feeding on sensuality and yielding to lust, I often poured out my heart to Him in supplication. PSALM 63:1-8 has been an encouragement to me on various occasions. If you are in the same position, I pray you will be strengthened too. Even though there will almost always be a desire and longing for God to bring in my future partner quickly, I believe God wants me to develop a greater love and heart after Him and exercise patience in prayer at this present time.

Christian friend, please pray for me that I will have God's plan, will and wisdom in awaiting His most treasured gift, outside of salvation, that is.

"Father, I want the cross even in the area of seeking You for a future marriage partner. I pray You will grant me the desires of my heart as I seek first Your Kingdom and Your righteousness. I ask this in Jesus' precious name. Amen."

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5. CAN GOD FURNISH A TABLE IN THE WILDERNESS?

"He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave *them* drink as *out of* the great depths. He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers. And they sinned yet more against him by provoking the most High in the wilderness. And they tempted God in their heart by asking meat for their lust. Yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams

overflowed; can he give bread also? can he provide flesh for his people?" (PSALM 78:15-20).

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When the crisis, testing and temptation that comes our way is so great and intense, we can either go the way of the flesh or the way of the Spirit.

While the way of the flesh focuses on how we (plural of "I", which is ego and pride when there is self-exaltation) can devise methods and strategies to find solutions to our problems; the way of the Spirit recognizes that we within ourselves are no match for the powers of the enemy, drive us to our knees in prayer and cry, "Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for thou *art* my praise" (JEREMIAH 17:14).

For example, when we are physically afflicted, do we immediately lay hold of the promises of God's Word concerning the accomplished atoning and healing work of Christ on the cross or do we panic and rush to visit the nearest doctor? Please do not ever misunderstand. I believe God does use medical science (and there are Godly doctors who know Jesus as Lord of their lives) but without the healing power and wisdom of God, no knowledge and theories will work. In fact, God can even heal the diseases that which the doctors say are medically impossible. Praise God! Jesus is the Great Physician and the Healer!

Likewise, in the realms of the Spirit, there are impossible situations in our lives, but as " ...with men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26) is His unchanging Word to us. Even in the wilderness, He will make a way for us!

"God, You are faithful and I praise You. You have delivered me in times past, is delivering me now and will yet deliver me. I thank You in Jesus name."

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6. GOD, YOU MUST BUILD THE HOUSE

“EXCEPT the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

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In the natural, ambitions and dreams are powerful motivating factors for the accomplishing of goals, whether for good or bad. Many natural and scientific inventions that we have taken for granted in the world we know today would not have been possible without the men and women who dared to attempt great ventures, even at the risk of failures. We should be thankful for these individuals for providing their contributions to our world as long as we recognize that the source of all light and knowledge comes from God.

In the church, many of us also desire to attempt great things for God. We have well-intentioned plans and programs, yet it is still possible that we are glorifying in the flesh. Even though we are busy working for the Lord, we do not have the peace and joy as we should. We become more like Martha, being “careful and troubled about many things” (Luke 10:41) when the Lord wants us to know that He does not dwell in buildings made by hands, but we are “builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:22).

No, I am not suggesting that we become loafers or passive observers in the work of God, but what I am saying is that if we do not take the time to sit in His Presence, worship and wait upon the Lord diligently, then all our public ministry and service is merely to build our own kingdoms. God is not interested in partnership with us, He desires and seeks ownership of us.

“God, You must build the house. Let me hide myself with You. Let me lose myself and find my life in You. I take hold of You. In Jesus name.”

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7. GOD’S ANSWER TO LONELINESS

“A man *that hath* friends must shew himself friendly: and there is a friend *that sticketh* closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24).

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Poet Milton said, “Loneliness is the first thing which God’s eye named as not good”. Perhaps, he must have gotten the idea from Genesis 2:18 which says, “And the LORD God said, *It is* not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him”.

Virtually all of us long to be accepted. From a young and tender age, we are already introduced to the concept and practice of having “friends”. Aside from our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, we know the value of friendship with fellow humans and what joy it can bring.

At an appointed time, most of us look beyond our average friends for someone special that could move us into a single dating relationship. However, my heart aches for those who buy Satan’s lie that sexual involvement is the only way to fulfil their loneliness. Prior to marriage, God wants every serious male/female relationship to experience an intimacy that is non-sexual in nature.

However, loneliness alone is NOT a good reason to enter into a male/female relationship, the development of the *agape* love of Christ is. Moreover, marriage may not necessarily be the answer to loneliness, but with friendship with Jesus (the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother) and Godly people within the Body of Christ is always desirable.

“Lord, help me love You more than anything. Bring me true companionship, fellowship divine in You. In Jesus name.”

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8. COME TO THE LIVING WATERS

“HO, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without

price. Wherefore do ye spend money for *that which is* not bread? And your labour for *that which* satisfieth not? harken diligently unto me, and eat ye *that which is* good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, *even* the sure mercies of David” (Isaiah 55:1-3).

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Do we truly hunger for God? Do we thirst for the Word? Can it be said of us, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? (Psalm 42:1-2).

Do we complain and groan whenever we are so busy in our work that we have no time for our natural meal, but think little or nothing about missing our feast at our Lord’s table? By this, I mean the size of our appetite to commune and be shut in with Him that by faith, we are “raised...up...and [made to] sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6).

As precious and as important as it is, it is not enough to just hear sermons from some great preachers or read books of some dedicated men and women of God telling us about their experiences, we need to be lost in the awesome wonder and glorious riches of Christ ourselves.

Just as many great civilizations and cities are located in close proximity to sources of water, we must live and walk in the Spirit to where we have continuous access to “rivers of living water” (according to John 7:38). Spiritually-speaking, we need to swim in the reservoir of His power and glory, “They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights” (Psalm 36:8; *NIV*); “...for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over” (Ezekiel 47:5). This completely satisfies!

“Lord, I thirst for You. You are the water of life, increase Your life within me. In Christ’s name.”

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9. ARE YOU PARTAKING OR FORSAKING THE LORD?

“Hath a nation changed *their* gods, which *are* yet no gods? but my people have changed their glory for *that which* doth not profit. For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:11,13).

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What are some of the activities that occupy our leisure time?

Do engagement in those moments of pleasure leave us spiritually empty and void afterwards?

If so, we have grieved the Lord. Our God is a jealous God. By our actions, we can afford the luxury and time to entertain ourselves with programs that lead the spirit barren and yet say we have little or no time for worshipping Jesus, abiding in prayer and the study of His Word.

Who are we fooling? Only ourselves for “be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Galatians 6:7-8).

Do not misunderstand here. I do not want to put anyone on an unnecessary guilt trip. There is nothing wrong in taking time off for vacations, jogging, cycling, dining, etc. However, if we find that we cannot engage in those activities and have our minds and thoughts on the Lord at the same time, then we need to withdraw from them. The bottom line is, “Will the Lord be pleased with me or will I be found faithful should He comes back suddenly?”

“Lord, cleanse me from all filth and let Your Living Waters flow. Come, Holy Spirit, take control and make me whole. In Jesus name.”

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10. THE HOLY REMNANT

“And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes, part of potters’ clay, and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And *as* the toes of the feet *were* part of iron, and part of clay, *so* the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken. And whereas thou sawest iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men: but they shall not cleave one to another, even as iron is not mixed with clay. And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, *but* it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Daniel 2:41-44).

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In the strictest sense, even though this passage of Scripture has reference pertaining to actual literal and physical earthly empires and kingdoms, I believe it can be used to talk about judgment and separation in the house of God- “For the time *is come* that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if *it first begin* at us, what shall the end *be* of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?” (1 Peter 4:17-18).

I do not want to be cranky. I know it breaks the heart of God and mine, as it does to some of you who still have spiritual convictions in this lax age. The church is becoming too worldly in its approach and conduct- too much hype and pleasure, lacking in discernment and holy anger. We are losing too many sons and daughters of the nation as well as the church to drugs and illicit sex instead.

True, we are living in the days of mass evangelism, but God is more jealous and concerned with making radical disciples, “I AM the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every *branch* that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into fire, and they are burned” (John 15:1,2,6).

Our great and awesome responsibility is not only to “...Go ye into all the world,

and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), but also to teach them to “observe all things whatsoever I (Jesus) have commanded you... ” (Matthew 28:20); “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *have ye* not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel” (1 Corinthians 4:15).

No, we do not need more self-appointed prophets who seek a name for themselves or merely draw a crowd to promote their careers, but what we critically need are shepherds whose hearts cry is to lift up the name of Jesus, that “He will draw all *men* unto me (Jesus Himself)” (John 12:32).

Let me tell you from the holy Scriptures how you can and will know whether a man or woman is of God or not, “And now I (Ga-ma’li-el, a doctor of the law) say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God” (Acts 5:38-39).

Are you part of God’s holy remnant today? No, I am not asking you whether you are religious or not, but I am asking that if Jesus suddenly appears, do you have “the hope that purifieth”- “And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure?” (1 John 3:3).

Another question is, Do you have mixtures in your life? Supposing your best-loved or most respected living Christian fell, would you lose your faith and your way with God as well? If yes, then he or she has become your god. You need to repent of this.

But if you have consistently stayed faithful and obedient to God, you will still be heartbroken for any failures. You will have a holy hatred and intolerance for his or her sins, but you will also be forgiving and loving in recognizing a repentant heart, seeking to hold and restore him or her with God’s great mercy.

Now, God’s holy remnant is not for the self-righteous, not for the false prophets and their followers, but will be “the remnant of my flock out of all countries wither I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. And I will set up shepherds over them which shall feed them: and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall they be lacking,

saith the LORD” (Jeremiah 23:3-4).

“God, give us shepherds who are after the Shepherd’s heart. We want to feel a portion of Your heartbeat. To weep when You weep, to rejoice when You rejoice. In Jesus name.”

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11. FAMINE IN THE LAND

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD” (Amos 8:11).

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Today, many believers are crying out desperately for life-giving spiritual food that will satisfy their inner needs.

Paradoxically, this is in spite of the abundance of spiritual resources, such as Christian books, music, seminars and videos. We hear of the latest “revelation”, psychology and religious rock and roll, but churches are not immune to cases of adultery, divorce, drugs and illicit sex. What’s wrong?

God’s Word speaks of the time where if what is being offered is not the Bread of God from heaven, no matter how appealing, ear-tickling and well-laid the sermons are, the decay will set in, leaving believers disillusioned and spiritually-starving. Little or no conviction of sin produces harden hearts who will not melt before God’s altar.

“God, give us men and women who will deliver the theme, “Prepare to meet thy God!”

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12. CHARACTER OR CHARISMA?

“And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and *with* fire: Whose fan *is* in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:10-12).

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For the past few decades, we have seen a sweeping wave of the operation of the gifts of the Spirit in the church commonly called the charismatic renewal.

From that has arisen a generation of believers who have entered into a higher level of praise, worship and evangelistic fervour. We often talk about the Holy Spirit’s baptism as the reservoir of power. This is no doubt important. However, out of this thrust, we have somehow neglect the preaching of the cross and the message of repentance as we should. We have focused more on spiritual charisma, faith and power. While much growth and success was accomplished, allow me to say that the Holy Ghost baptism also has fire to it- the fire of holiness and purity. Read Matthew 3:11.

To be certain, the demonstration of the gifts and power of the Spirit is indispensable to this hour, but when all is said and done, it is the fruit of the Spirit that we shall be known- “Ye shall know them by their fruits...” (Matthew 7:16). Something is missing if we merely want spiritual power but not purity. This in part explains why certain people fall into sin even though they have the charisma, gifts and power of God and are greatly used of Him. Let’s ask Him to create in us a consuming love and passion with character and strength in the inner person so that when we encounter tribulations, we will still stand by the keeping power of Jesus.

“Lord, I want the cross, for every blessing of character and charisma comes through the cross. I want the baptism of the Holy Spirit with fire, for with it comes power and purity. In Jesus’ mighty and holy name.”

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13. DO I LOVE JESUS MORE THAN ANYTHING?

“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly *is* plenteous, but the labourers *are* few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into the harvest” (Matthew 9:36-38).

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In a constantly changing world, there is a call that never changes, “God *is* not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do *it*? Or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? Behold, I have received *commandment* to bless: and he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it” (Numbers 23:19-20).

What is the greatest blessing or gift that any individual can receive from you that will make a difference for all time and all eternity? Without a shadow of doubt, it is for you to impart the gospel story so that he or she can receive “...life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Jesus commissioned us to preach the message of salvation, to “go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 28:19).

He could have sent His angels, but He has appointed you and I for evangelism. Supposing He say that if we do not undertake this awesome privilege and responsibility, He would take us home to glory immediately, how would we respond? Would we accuse Him of being a hard taskmaster?

But if I do know a portion of His heart, I really believe this is what Jesus would ask us in effect, as He asked Simon Peter, “Do you love Me more than these?”

Will our response be as Peter’s, “Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee” (John

21:15).

And Jesus will say to us, “ ...Feed my lambs” (John 21:15).

Are we in constant meditation and gratitude for the cross? Do we see the utter sinfulness of our life prior to receiving Jesus and continue to be humbled by the grace of God in our new life of faith?

Jesus resists the proud and the self-righteous and gives grace to the humble and the unworthy, “Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the *same* loveth little” (Luke 7:47).

Do we have our own personal life-changing testimony? It may not necessarily be dramatic but it must be a turning point in our life that will always cause us to remember our indebtedness to God. Aside from preaching the Word of God, this is the next most effective key to evangelism, “but we were gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children. We loved you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us” (1 Thessalonians 2:7-8; *NIV*). I wonder how many of us are won to Christ merely on the basis of listening to the right preaching or teaching, or is it because we also witness the demonstration of Christian love and power in action?

God has a plan for us. He has faith in us, not because of who we are, but because of what He can accomplish in and through us, as we receive the power of the Holy Spirit.

“Precious Jesus, I want to love You more. I receive the call to know You, love You and serve You. In Christ name.”

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14. HOW CAN I SERVE GOD WHEN I AM IN PRISON?

"Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, And said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is *he*, whosoever shall not be offended in me" (MATTHEW 11:2-6).

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Most of us may never be locked in a literal prison cell. But in our spirits, we are in the dungeons of despair. We seek the will of God, do our best in serving Him, yet find ourselves in trouble as far as natural circumstances go.

The heartbreak of broken relationships, depression, disappointment, embarrassment, terminal illness, loneliness, rejection, the loss of a loved one, so on and so forth. We are under pressure, bound by the chain of utter hopelessness. In moments like these, we question God's omnipotence and omnipresence.

With the answer given to John the Baptist, God is not indifferent to our pain. Rather, He wants us to know that we are not alone in our sufferings, and that His work does not merely revolve around us, or is always predicate by our present understanding of His purpose and ways. In other words, God is still on the throne, even when our private world falls apart. The Father's heart reaches out to us now as we cry, "*I had fainted*, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD" (PSALM 27:13-14).

"Lord, I cry to You in my desperate need of relief from despair and pain. Heal me, touch me, You are the only strength of my life. In Jesus mighty name."

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15. WANTED: COMPASSIONATE HEARTS

"...Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee" (MARK 5:19).

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In a world where wrong seems right, do people know that we are Christians? Do we walk differently, talk differently that we "sanctify the Lord God in (our) your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear?" (1 PETER 3:15).

It doesn't matter whether we work as a business person, doctor, lawyer, pastor or teacher, we are all called to communicate the gospel, to be ministers of the covenant of reconciliation in the community, the marketplace or even in the foreign land where God places us.

By our spiritual indifference and slumber, we've allowed the devil to have his time for far too long. It's time for the church to arise and make a stand, "Enough is enough, devil! We are possessing back what is rightfully ours!"- "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (EPHESIANS 5:15-16); "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time" (COLOSSIANS 4:5); "...he (Satan) knoweth that he hath but a short time" (REVELATION 12:12); "And that, knowing the time, that now *it is* high time to awake out of sleep: for now *is* our salvation nearer than when we believed" (ROMANS 13:11).

We need to burn with passion for Jesus, He then moves us with compassion for precious souls.

"Master, I confess I lack a shepherd's heart. As You have compassion on me, move me with compassion for others. Let me tell my friends what great things You have done for me. In Christ's precious name."

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16. JESUS IS OUR DAILY BREAD OF LIFE

"...man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God" (LUKE 4:4).

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In these days where natural "fast food" are so widely available, there is a danger for us Christians to extend this philosophy to our spiritual lives too. We want quick answers from some book or tape that will offer "how to" kind of formulae. But if we desire to go all the way with God, then there are no shortcuts to our spiritual growth and knowledge. We will learn to wait upon the Lord instead of merely telling Him to do such and such for us.

Especially when we are living in tough times such as ours, many of us will be tried by fire. The foundation of belief in the Word we hold will determine our character and destiny.

Are we growing more and more uncomfortable with the evil around us and yet feel the burden for world evangelism and compassion for precious souls? If so, we are partaking a portion of the food which Jesus spoke of in JOHN 4:34, "...My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work". Jesus Himself is the Bread of Life and strength and we need to partake of Him diligently. However, if our Christian experience is dry and boring, then it is possible that we are doing many things in vain, no matter how busy and occupied we are. If we lack the joy we once knew, then we must quickly ask Him to increase our appetite and restore our hunger for "the bread of God...which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world" (JOHN 6:33).

If we do not delight ourselves in His Presence, then we are too busy for the wrong priorities indeed. We need to get back to the written Word, which will point us to the Living Word, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed" (JOHN 6:27).

"Lord, fill me with Your Word and wisdom, out of it are the wellspring of Life. You alone completely satisfy. I thank You in Jesus blessed name."

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17. HE CAME TO SET THE CAPTIVES FREE

"The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (LUKE 4:18). Also, read ISAIAH 61:1.

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Whether we realize it or not, demon spirits do oppose and oppress believers (though they cannot cross the blood line and possess us. There is a difference between oppression and possession). As we put on the whole armour of God (according to EPHESIANS 6:11) and stand on the mighty name of Jesus Christ (according to JOHN 14:13, 15:16, 16:26 and 20:31), we will overcome "him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of (our) their testimony; and (we love) they loved not (our) their lives unto the death" (REVELATION 12:11).

Because he (Satan) "he knoweth that he hath but a short time" (REVELATION 12:12), he often attacks us with great fury. But as certain kinds of opposition "goeth not out but by prayer and fasting" (MATTHEW 17:21), we need to intercede and travail like never before. And we need to do this not just for our own deliverance and victory in the Lord, but for our spiritual leaders and the Body of Christ as well. It is said in effect that the greater the call and responsibility of God is upon one's life, "the more the enemy targets his arrows at" - "...For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required..." (LUKE 12:48).

Even Jesus was not spared the powerful temptation and oppression of the devil arrayed against Him (read MATTHEW 4:1-11). But praise God! He was victorious and never once failed. Hallelujah!

Regrettably, all of us has failed one time or other. But as we have experienced the lovingkindness and tender mercies of the Lord in redeeming our life from destruction (according to PSALM 103:4), let us minister words of healing and kindness to our brothers and sisters in the Lord who are hurt and wounded in spiritual warfare and they (and we) do not understand why.

Instead of judging them unscripturally, let us be patient with them, be listening ears and "weep with them that weep" (ROMANS 12:15), as God enables. More than that, ask of God for anointing and wisdom as we be comforters and consolers in His Body, "COMFORT ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*" (ISAIAH 40:1-5).

"Lord, even as the enemy comes in like a flood, we ask that You raise up a body of believers who will comfort others in trouble even as they themselves are comforted of You. Here am I, use me all You can as well. In the name of Jesus."

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18. WHAT IS GOD'S VERDICT ON YOU?

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (JOHN 3:16).

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This verse of Scripture is a beloved one for many individuals because so much is portrayed within such few words. It can be said to be the gospel of Jesus Christ in a nutshell.

Hence, the appeal of God's love is not only universal as in "the world", but also powerfully personal, as in "whosoever". "That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" includes you, it includes me. Jesus has already opened the way to everlasting life by His death and resurrection. But it remains your responsibility and mine to "believe". This is the condition of salvation, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt

believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (ROMANS 10:9-10).

You see, a day of reckoning is coming whereby the Righteous Judge Himself will in essence pronounce either "guilty" or "not guilty" on us on the basis of our response to the gospel of Jesus Christ, "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (ROMANS 2:16)

It is never God's intention for us to be "guilty" and end up in eternal separation from Him. Salvation belongs to our God and eternal damnation rightly belongs to the devil and his angels (read MATTHEW 25:41). It is only our lives and actions, when we choose to reject God's Word, that will ultimately condemn us. But God has given us the good news of the gospel of Christ, that "the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (ROMANS 6:23); that "I (Jesus) am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly" (JOHN 10:10).

Is there an empty void in your life?

Do you need peace with God?

You can have a relationship with Jesus Christ right now. The choice is yours. If you say "yes", here's what you must do,

Admit the fact that you are a sinner, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (ROMANS 3:23);

Be willing to repent from disobedience and rebellion against God, " ...except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (LUKE 13:3);

Believe that Jesus is your only Saviour, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (JOHN 3:16);

Confess, trust and receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (ROMANS 10:9-10).

Please pray this prayer and do mean it with all of your heart:

"Dear Lord Jesus Christ, I now recognize that I am a sinner and I am in need of salvation. I accept the sacrifice You paid for me on the cross of Calvary and I allow Your precious shed blood to cleanse me. I now surrender myself to You and invite You to be my Lord and Saviour. Please come into my heart. Take full control of my life and help me to live and serve You from this moment forward. I ask in the name of Jesus. Amen."

If you prayed this prayer in all sincerity, you are now a child of God. We invite you to write us that we might rejoice with you. God loves you, I love you, and I trust your brothers and sisters in the Lord love you too. We encourage you to find fellowship in a Bible-believing, Spirit-filled church and obtain a copy of the Bible and that you read it diligently so that you will be the kind of Christian God wants you to be.

"Heavenly Father, I pray that my Christian brothers and sisters will grow in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray that all our non-Christian friends will come to know You as Lord and Saviour. That all of us will hungry for the Bread of God who gives life to the world. In the name of Jesus Christ."

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19. OBEYING GOD RATHER THAN MEN

"Then Peter and the *other* apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men" (ACTS 5:29).

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In these days where religious politics have become commonplace, we are facing a drought of genuine spiritual leadership.

To be certain, we have no lack of educated individuals and no lack of organized committees in the church, but show us men and women who through personal experiences, know the power of Christ's resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. Priests who "weep between the porch and the altar" (JOEL 2:17) and preachers who preach "what thus saith the Lord".

Fresh from the prayer closet with broken hearts, crying over sin and speaking the truth in love, warning people to flee from the wrath to come. These breed of ministers seem to be few and far between!

The early disciples knew what it meant and took to tarry in prayer. But once the will and wisdom of God was sought, there was no turning back. They moved on in action, choosing to "obey God rather than men" (ACTS 5:29). Even if it meant receiving threats, they asked the Lord to enable them to "speak (His) your word with great boldness" (ACTS 4:29; NIV).

How we need servants of God today who will not appeal to the flesh or merely what the people want to hear, but on what God is speaking. Ministers who do not seek popularity or the praise of men, but whose undivided motivation is the approval and the touch of God.

"God, raise up men and women who will walk softly before You in prayer but boldly before the devil and men."

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20. THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS

"For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 CORINTHIANS 2:2).

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It's time for the modern-day church to get back to the cross, to the cross of Calvary where Jesus shed His precious blood. Many a times, we are getting too sophisticated in our approach. We are substituting fads and vain self-help programs (such as psychotherapy, seminars, etc., etc.) for the simple and unadulterated truth of the gospel.

The pursuit of higher education, knowledge, science, etc. within themselves are incomplete without a relationship with Jesus Christ. I am not demeaning such achievements or qualifications, but what I am saying is that what man desperately needs today is not more intellectual indoctrination, but the transformation of the heart that effects a change in lifestyle. Has it occurred to you that morally and

spiritually-speaking, society has not improved even in countries where there is a high level of education and literacy? Only the power of God can address the deep and real issues of man's search for life. Of course, the truth is that man's basic problem is sin, not lack of education, economic status, environmental balance, political ideology or whatever you can conceive of in the natural. I know I am not displaying any intellectual integrity here, but I might prefer to be a fool for Christ if necessary.

On the authority of God's Word, I want to say this, "Any gospel that does not have the message of the cross and the blood of Jesus is "another" gospel. It is accursed and scheduled for destruction" (please read 2 CORINTHIANS 11:1-4).

Every single blessing we receive comes through the cross. The Holy Spirit comes through the cross. Deliverance, healing and redemption comes through the cross. Praise God! What appeared to be defeat on the cross gives way to victory. Jesus was not only crucified, He was also resurrected and glorified. And soon, Jesus is coming again! Hallelujah!

"Saviour, I thank You for the cross. Thank You for saving my soul, for bleeding and dying for someone such as I. It is Your amazing grace that saved a wretch like me. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth."

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21. NOT JUST FOR WHAT HE CAN DO, BUT FOR WHO HE IS

"...Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 CORINTHIANS 2:9-10).

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Even though it is scriptural to pray, "Give me ...help me ...bless me" kinds of prayers as is exhorted in PHILIPPIANS 4:6, "Be careful for nothing; but in every

thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God", Jesus calls us to a deeper life in Him whereby His Presence alone matters to us more than any tangible thing we can ever receive from Him- "Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ" (PHILIPPIANS 3:8).

Do we have a hunger and passion for Him above and beyond merely asking Him for answers, blessings and help? Are our ministries and reputations more important to us than our simple child-like love relationship with Him? Are we merely interested in seeing prayer results, or do we also want to be transformed to the likeness of Christ in our character? Do we earnestly desire to walk intimately with Him to the extent that we manifest the Presence of Jesus in partaking a portion of His burden and heart? Do we feel His holy hatred for sin, yet moved with compassion for the lost?

"Bread of God, I hunger for Your life. Jesus, I desire more of You. I seek You not just for what You can do, but for who You are. In Christ's name."

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22. THE MINISTRY OF COMFORT AND CONSOLATION

"Blessed *be* God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ" (2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-5).

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In our flesh, none of us like any kind of suffering. We have seen how afflictions have caused certain people to be bitter and angry at God and fellow men. However, if we will allow God to do His work, then it is possible that "tribulation

worketh patience" (ROMANS 5:3).

When an individual rarely, if ever, experienced distress, he or she can say all the right things, yet offers no true comforting effects to the ones in need of hearing it. Are you abused, lonely, misunderstood and rejected? Take heart and joy that you are not alone, for "we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are, yet* without sin" (HEBREWS 4:15).

Beloved, I say nothing and nobody can touch that need in the inner person except when we are being driven to Jesus. More important than deliverance from trial or affliction, God wants us to be able to cry, "For to me to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain" (PHILIPPIANS 1:21).

In these last days, a flood of sorrow and pain amongst the godly is so intense that we need to bleed with those who bleed, grieve with those who grieve.

"Lord, I need Your compassion to bring comfort and encouragement to those who are hurting and are in sorrow. Holy Spirit, touch through me. Let Your healing virtues flow. In Jesus name."

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23. TO BE WITH CHRIST OR TO REMAIN IN THE BODY?

"*We are* troubled on every side, yet not distressed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted , but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body" (2 CORINTHIANS 4:8-10).

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Do you know of friends who have a strong walk with God and yet encounter a series of suffering that lasts for days, months or even years?

Pain so intense that to be taken home to be with Jesus would be sweeter?

If there was any individual who knew pain and rejection to the point of despairing of life, it was the Apostle Paul, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh *is* more needful for you" (PHILIPPIANS 1:23-24).

Should Paul be still alive today, I suspect that some people would judge him, saying, "Where's your faith? How can you preach the gospel under such powerful anointing on one hand and yet experience such burden and defeat in your own life on the other?"

Brethren, I believe that many of us cannot fully relate to the full import of statements such as PHILIPPIANS 1:23 because we serve God out of convenience, instead of commission (by this, I mean obeying our Commander-in-chief to the extent that we seek to win the lost at any cost). To be certain, we do love and serve Him, but not to the extent where our comfort zone is invaded. Careers, education, families, friends and materialism have become our security. It would be a frightening thing for many of us if some of these things are taken away from us. But if the foundation of our lives is to do the will of God, especially in fulfilling the Great Commission, then "where (our) your treasure is, there will (our) your heart be also" (MATTHEW 6:21). No, we would never take our own lives, but should the Lord call us home, we would not feel the loss of any earthly accomplishments and possessions, except that we would no longer be able to strive "together for the faith of the gospel" (PHILIPPIANS 1:27) this side of heaven.

"Lord, use me as a vessel in fulfilling Your Great Commission, to be a faithful steward of the gospel. In the name of Jesus Christ."

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24. ARE WE GOING TO BE PRESENT AT THE MARRIAGE SUPPER?

"For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 CORINTHIANS 11:2).

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The glorious work of the Holy Spirit is not only to give us a foretaste of Christ here and now, "the earnest of our inheritance" (EPHESIANS 1:14), but also to complete it when we are brought home to be with Jesus, our eternal Bridegroom, "...now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (1 CORINTHIANS 13:12).

The very thought that we are going to be present at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb should shake us from our lukewarmness and set our hearts on fire for Him. If we do not intensely yearn for His Presence now, what makes us think that we are going to enjoy heaven? What is our concept of heaven? Is it just to escape the fires of hell? No, it is where we will commune and worship Him forever and ever! Some of us get a little weary when the worship service gets too long, but let us know that "when we've been there ten thousand years ...we've no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun" (AMAZING GRACE).

In preparing us as pure virgins to Christ, the Holy Spirit wants to constantly "trim our lamps" (according to MATTHEW 25:7), anointing us with "fresh oil" (PSALM 92:10). In other words, we need to be ready, wakeful and watchful, having a holy zeal as we allow the Holy Spirit to do the work of sanctification in us, "that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (EPHESIANS 5:27).

"Jesus, Lover of my soul. O, how I love You because You first loved me. Convict me of any sin. Forgive me. Cleanse me. Set me apart in holiness and purity. In Jesus' holy name."

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25. NO THORN, NO COMPASSION

"And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-9).

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Even though I believe that going before the Lord in prayer and in the feeding of His Word holds all the answers to our problems (according to MATTHEW 11:28-30), we are not independent of the rest of the body of Christ as we need to "bear ye one another's burdens..." (GALATIANS 6:2).

Some of us may receive tremendous help and blessings from the Lord in our devotions with Him and think that we are strong on our own. We feel that if we are mature Christians and we have enough faith, it would be shameful to approach other seemingly weaker or younger Christian for help and ministry.

Perhaps, a more well-known minister of the Gospel has a greater problem in seeking help from a lesser known one, or any other believer, for that matter. Supposing you are a pastor of a church with an attendance averaging 5,000 and you are beginning to experience a secret battle, would you overcome pride and be transparent and seek help from another pastor friend of yours (whom you can trust) with attendance averaging 500 in church?

I know comparing the size of one's ministry with another is ridiculous and does not please the Lord, but the point I am making is that pride is no respecter of persons, even if you are greatly used of God.

We would do well to learn some lessons from the Apostle Paul in 2 CORINTHIANS 12:7-9 and know that God is more interested in the character of our inner person (according to EPHESIANS 3:16) than mere outward popularity or reputation in the sight of men. And how can we be "strengthened with might by his Spirit in the

inner man" (EPHESIANS 3:16) unless we like Peter, "strengthen thy brethren" (LUKE 22:32) and allow them to minister to us likewise. Just as Peter went through a "sifting" experience (according to LUKE 22:31), we may be given a thorn in our walk with God. But with the hurt of our hearts being ministered to by the body of Christ, we are now qualified in Him, to minister to others in love and compassion, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (GALATIANS 6:2).

Brothers and sisters, we may be different parts and have various calling (according to ROMANS 11:29), yet we are one. We all need each other.

"Lord, forgive me for the times when I gossip or judge the weaknesses of a fellow brother or sister. Help me now to minister Your healing grace in love and compassion instead. In Jesus name."

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26. THE SPIRITUAL FRUIT OF MALE/FEMALE RELATIONSHIPS

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law" (GALATIANS 5:22-23).

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Aside from our relationship with Jesus Christ, the next most important relationship for most of us is to develop a friendship with that member of the opposite sex who will become our mate in marriage. As we believe God for this, let me encourage you to pray and seek for a helpmate who seeks after God. He/She should be godly-minded and Christ-like in his/her outlook.

Then he/she should bear the fruit of the Spirit. Also, being diligent in fulfilling his/her God-given roles both at home and in public is to be highly-commendable. Of course, being faithful and trustworthy is that hallmark that should never be overlooked.

Even as we desire such fine qualities in our helpmates, let us also remember to be

examples of godliness and righteousness ourselves as well.

Sister, when your potential hero comes along, you owe it to yourself to ask if he is able to declare and practise as Joshua did so long ago, "...as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (JOSHUA 24:15).

And brother, what do you look for in a potential mate?

I believe PROVERBS 31:30 will help you move in the right direction, "Favour *is* deceitful, and beauty *is* vain: *but* a woman *that* feareth the LORD, she shall be praised". And I'll say, "Amen!"

If such virtues are found to be in the affirmative, then continue to walk in the Spirit and wait for God's will. As you do so, I believe you will reap a lifelong reward of the most precious of all physical relationships God can provide.

"Father, I ask for wisdom as I believe You for someone who seeks after You. Beginning with myself, I pray that I will continuously bear the fruit of the Spirit for such are the qualities that will weather any storm of relationships. In the lovely name of Jesus."

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27. GOD'S PLAN OF MARRIAGE

"Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (EPHESIANS 5:22,25).

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The act of marriage is a beautiful portrayal of God's relationship to the church. It is marked and ordained with His seal of approval.

When we walk in the Spirit and seek His wisdom in finding the right partner, we will not only become part of the fabric that holds the nation together, but establish a heritage of faithfulness and godliness that is honourable for all those who will come behind us. Such a covenant relationship will weather any storm that the enemy may try to bring across our path.

The benefits of godly marriages are tremendous. It brings two people together

mentally, spiritually, emotionally, socially and physically. While the devil has perverted sex in many lives, God wants us to know that there is beauty and pleasure in the marriage union as we follow His will. God created sex and the act of love reserved for marriage and marriage alone is not meant to repress or restrict us while we are still single, but to protect us physically and spiritually. He wants us to respect our future marriage partner and be respected by him or her likewise.

"Father, I want to have a new respect for Your love. That in Your time, I will be able to love my future marriage partner and give myself purely for her (or him, if you are a Christian lady) even as Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it. In Jesus blessed name."

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28. LOVE, RESPECT AND REVERENCE FOR GOD

"For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 TIMOTHY 1:7).

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The "spirit of fear" that is being mentioned in 2 TIMOTHY 1:7 is one that is destructive, harmful and "hath torment" (according to 1 JOHN 4:18).

However, there is a "fear" in the context of "respect" and "reverence" that it is wise to have, "Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth..." (JOSHUA 24:14).

There is no contradiction here because while we are not to allow the "spirit of fear" (the destructive and paralyzing kind) as instigated by Satan to dominate our existence, "fearing God" (the love, respect and reverence we have in acknowledging His omnipotence) actually helps us to walk in "power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 TIMOTHY 1:7).

Many of us, if not all, wants to walk in the victory of the Lord. However, "the

secret of the LORD *is* with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant" (PSALM 25:14). Do we truly fear (respect and reverence) and love God? Then we will "hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth (or perverse speech in the NIV translation), do I hate" (PROVERBS 8:13).

In my experience, I have met people in their zeal and power coming to another to point out his or her sins while being blind to their own. What's lacking? I believe it is humility, love and mercy.

While a hatred for sin should cause us to cry out, "Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies" (PSALM 139:21-22), we need to first and foremost have our own hearts examined and searched, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if *there be any* wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (PSALM 139:23-24).

If we want power, love and sound mind, it is not because we want to have judgment fall on others, but because we desire mercy, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole *duty* of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil" (ECCLESIASTES 12:13-14).

"Lord, I want to walk in the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. I want a pure hatred for sin. But let me desire mercy for the broken and the repentant. In Jesus name."

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29. IS OUR WALK WITH GOD IN VAIN?

"If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion *is* vain" (JAMES 1:26).

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Obviously, from the understanding of the context, James is not talking about what

most of us consider vile sinners (such as adulterers or murderers), but he, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is challenging us, the church people, about the validity of our spirituality. It is something we cannot afford to ignore because to think that all the good we've done for the Lord is negated due to our careless and unguarded tongues is frightening.

The Word mentions many kinds of tongues that are abominations unto God and we need to guard ourselves against them. They are flattering tongue (PSALM 5:9), proud tongue (PSALM 12:3), lying tongue (PSALM 109:2, PROVERBS 6:17), deceitful tongue (PSALM 120:2), backbiting tongue (PSALM 25:23), etc.

When something like the use of tongue is spoken so frequently throughout the Bible (especially in various portions of PSALM, PROVERBS, MATTHEW, JAMES and other books of the Bible), it must be deemed very important.

Jesus warns strongly, "...That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment" (MATTHEW 12:36). If I boast in the flesh, I know I will be able to find room for self-consolation, saying in effect, "Lord, I don't gossip like some people I know of do". But you see, I have learnt not to compare myself with what others do or don't do, say or don't say. I have to see myself in the "mirror" of God's Word, under the searchlight of the Holy Spirit. It is not my business to point finger at others. And even if it is true that there are others more guilty at such sins, I am already overwhelmed by the realization that it is I (and no one else) who will have to give account of any unrepentant idle words I say.

Friend, I know I need to turn and return to the Lord in repentance and deliverance in this area. And I need the Holy Spirit's Presence to guard my hearts and thoughts primarily because "...out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (MATTHEW 12:34).

As He enables, will you be kind and extend your hands toward me in prayer, interceding that I will experience victory over my thought life. That every root of bitterness, covetousness, envy, jealousy, pride and whatever hidden faults will be removed out of my heart and innermost being.

More than anything else, on the day of the judgment seat of Christ, I want to be

able to hear my Master say unto me, " ...Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (MATTHEW 25:21). And the attitude of my heart and the words I speak now will make all the difference in time and eternity.

"Lord, I have shared my heart and be transparent with the people whom You have entrusted their lives with mine. I ask for a pure heart and a gracious tongue. In Jesus name."

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30. I NEED CLEANSING FOR MY MOUTH AND MY HEART

"For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same *is* a perfect man, *and* able also to bridle the whole body" (JAMES 3:2).

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I constantly ask the Lord, whether explicitly or implicitly, to enable me, "by the mercies of God, that (I) ye present (my) your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is (my)* your reasonable service" (ROMANS 12:1). How I desire to please Him in every way the best I can, in His strength.

Yet oftentimes, I find the tongue is usually the first part of my body that caused me to sin. Whether it is due to words of complain or gossip, I suddenly find that I have somehow lost my close communion and "rightness with God". I come under strong conviction. I have grieved the Holy Spirit.

In recent days, this has become one of my greatest sins that I am aware of. As the Holy Spirit expose the condition of my heart and tongue, I have to confess like Isaiah, " ...Woe is me! for I am undone; because I *am* a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts" (ISAIAH 6:5). By the grace of God, I probably have never conciously or wilfully curse and use words of blatant vulgarity, but I am

convinced and persuaded that words of habitual "innocent" complaints are just as filthy in the presence of a holy God.

Christian friend, if you are able, you can pray with me for this area of my life that I desperately need victory and yet find myself almost invariably overwhelmed and powerless in the same position all over again and again.

"God, let the fire of the Holy Spirit burn the dross of sin that is within my heart and my mouth. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer. In Jesus name."

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31. EVER BEING ACCUSED OF HIDDEN SIN OR LACK OF FAITH?

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 PETER 4:12-13).

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Do you love and trust the Lord, closer to Him than ever- and yet undergoing some fiery trial?

And then have you been told that it is due to hidden sin or lack of faith?

Beloved, you might have been cruelly judged by some shallow believers who believes or teaches that suffering has no place in the Christian experience.

For if God's Word is true- and it is, I (as well as others who have experienced suffering in spite of loving the Lord) choose to believe that power and victory can only come through the cross! And how can we be of help in the ministry of comfort, consolation and reconciliation if we live a life of continuous ease and prosperity?

Do not misunderstand here. I believe God does bless and prosper His children; but of a greater priority, He does not want us to go astray- "Before I was afflicted I

went astray: but now have I kept thy word. *It is* good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes" (PSALM 119:67,71).

Human nature is such that all comfort and ease often leads us to trust in the flesh and in ourselves. If we do not have the gentleness and humility of Christ, it is easy to backslide and fall into the sin of the pride of life in the hour of power.

Friend, if your eyes is on the Lord and you exercise a simple and childlike faith and yet face troubles, know this, "Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver *us*" (2 CORINTHIANS 1:10); " ...Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD... " (EXODUS 14:13).

Hold on! You will see the Lord's victory!

"Lord, expose the works of the flesh that I will not depend on them. I put my trust in You. In Christ's name."

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Your WORD Is Strength

The Bible is the most important book in the entire world.

Though authored by men, it is the Holy Spirit who inspired every thought and word, “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21).

It is God’s letter to us, the book of divine instructions. Through its pages, we find rebuke for our sin and comfort in times of sorrow, “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It is the means to know the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, “IN the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).

As we walk with the Lord, we will learn to hear His voice and seek to do His will, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

Unfortunately, many believers neglect faith, prayer and the study of God’s Word. This results in boredom, dryness and emptiness, etc. There are no “quick fixes” in receiving from God. We need to wait in His Presence and devour His Word, not just read “how to” books on Christian living. I ask that the Holy Spirit will awaken you to “draw nigh to God” (James 4:8) and know the true source of strength for your every need as I say this, “As precious and as important as it is, it is not enough to just hear sermons from some great preachers or read books of some dedicated men and women of God telling us about their experiences, we need to be lost in the awesome wonder and glorious riches of Christ ourselves as we feast at His table in the secret closet of prayer”. He is the manna from on high, the Bread who satisfies us completely.

Birtherd out of my own desperate cry and need for more of Him, I pray that this volume of writings will encourage you to enter into “the school of the Holy Spirit” yourself. Don’t depend entirely on some book, tape, counsellor, shepherd or pastor for answer and wisdom. Instead, get on your face before God and the Holy Ghost will be your true Comforter and Preacher. It is He who brings the Scriptures alive to you and enables you to apply His truth in your everyday life as you hunger for Christ and Christ alone.

Jonathan

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